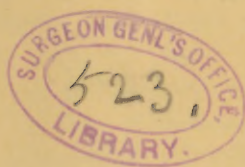


Ohmann - Dumesnil (A.H.)

Neuro-dermatology.



NEURO-DERMATOLOGY.*

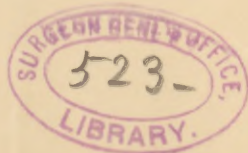
By A. H. OHMANN-DUMESNIL, St. Louis,

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GENTLEMEN:—I desire, first of all, to express to you my most heartfelt thanks for the great honor you conferred upon me in electing me to the office of chairman of this section. I am fully aware of the partiality you displayed in this, and it is my sincere hope that I shall so conduct the proceedings that you shall have no cause to regret the choice you made. The section, I am proud to say, has been well attended in former years. Moreover, it has had the time at its disposal fully occupied in the consideration of the many valuable papers and interesting discussions which have come before it. The indications for the present meeting are equally encouraging despite the fact that the majority have traveled such enormous distances to attend. And here, let me thank one and all of those here for this most tangible proof of their unwavering interest in the subject of dermatology and syphilology.

In my studies connected with a number of cutaneous diseases I have been forcibly impressed by the fact that many of the pathological processes which occur are directly or remotely connected with the nervous system, which, as you all know, plays such an important part both in the functions of the healthy individual, as well as in the disturbances incident to disease. The importance is such that it has called forth the special labors of a most indefatigable set of workers who constitute the neurologists and neuropathologists of to-day. Psychical as well as physical disturbances have their influence to such a degree that it is not astonishing to hear some

* Chairman's Address before Section on Dermatology and Syphilography of the American Medical Association, June meeting, 1894.



neurologists make the claim that the pathology of the future will be confined to that of the nervous system. Be this as it may, we are confronted at this day with an array of facts so numerous and so convincing in their nature, that we are forced to the inevitable conclusion that dermatic affections, in numerous cases, depend for their being, evolution and full development upon changes in the nerves, both functional and organic.

A large class of dermatoses which is daily awakening more and more interest is that included under the general term erythemata, as well as others which have been clearly set forth in the various systems of classification which have appeared from time to time. S. Jessner, last year in a monograph,* groups his first class into three varieties all clearly neurotic in character, viz., anomalies of sensibility, of mobility and of secretion. The very groundwork of these changes is nervous. In his second class we find four groups, in three of which are to be found skin diseases of neurotic origin. Again, in the classes of hypertrophies and atrophies, numbers are to be found of more or less distinct neurotic origin, as also in the inflammatory diseases. Almost all the regressive disturbances of nutrition, the sixth-class of Jessner (*Regressive Ernährungsstörungen*), are of distinctly neurotic origin.

I have briefly alluded to this author's classification, as his attempt has been to make it upon an anatomico-pathological basis. It is wise in that an etiological classification would be as confusing as Willan's system, which was purely based upon objective symptoms. But the most modern classification shows us that almost every class contains skin diseases in whose causation the nervous system exercises no small degree of influence, thus accentuating the vast importance it has in reference to dermatoses.

Upon a closer examination of the subject we find

* "Ein Dermatologisches System auf pathologisch-anatomischer (Hebra'scher), Basis." Hamburg, 1893.

that a most deep study is necessary to fully grasp the importance of the rôle played by the nervous system as it is called—erroneously perhaps, for it embraces so vast a field that specialization would seem to be a prime necessity. A moment's thought will suffice to demonstrate this when we but consider that the various portions going to make up the different systems of nerves, all play more or less important parts in the production of affections of the skin, organic or functional. In fact the changes in the nerves themselves may be either organic or functional, producing direct or reflex changes. The parts of the general nervous system involved may be the brain, spinal cord, or the spinal or cranial nerves either superficial or deep. In addition to this the sympathetic nervous system exerts a by no means small influence, through perturbations of its fibers, ganglia, nerve-terminals in the skin, or those as yet hypothetical terminations, which are generally known as trophic nerves.

I certainly do not wish to pose as one desirous of reducing all dermatological etiology to a simple neurotic basis, but I do wish to say that our pathology has been limited more than it should be to the consideration of histological and micro-organic changes without taking into consideration to a sufficient extent the changes occurring in the nerves and their terminals. I fully understand the difficulties which lie in the path of the pathologist the moment he essays to discover changes in the finest terminations of nerves, but they are surely not insurmountable.

In 1882, Henri Leloir published his studies,* up to that time, in a monograph which stands to-day a monument to his energy and talents. The work so auspiciously begun does not seem to have brought forth anything but isolated papers, but even these are of sufficient value and importance to indicate the serious attention which the whole subject deserves. Unna, in a study of

* "*Recherches Cliniques et Anatomico-Pathologiques sur les Affections Cutanées d'Origine Nerveuse.*" Paris, 1882.

the neurotic changes occurring in the skin in syphilis and leprosy, read before the First International Congress of Dermatology, has distinctly shown the existence of such lesions, which he has named neuro-syphilidæ and neuro-lepridæ. I could go on multiplying such examples to show that I am by no means laying undue stress or attaching too much importance to what may be called neuro-dermatology. I only desire to call attention to a most important, as well as interesting portion of dermatology, which seems to be rather neglected, or, at least, is not receiving that attention which its importance would seem to demand.

I would even make so bold as to venture a prediction that the dermatology of the future will be enriched by a general chapter, which will be added to the general considerations on the subject—and this chapter will be devoted to neuro-dermatology or a consideration of the rôle played, in the production of, as well as changes in, cutaneous lesions, by the general and special systems which go to make up the complex nerve structures of the body. The formulation of such a chapter will be necessitated by the exigencies of the conditions found and will add one more interesting part to a subject already rich in interesting and valuable data and information.

I know that not the least valuable additions are destined to emanate from this section, as it has fully demonstrated its capabilities in the past and its possibilities for the future. All the members are good, honest, indefatigable workers to whom "there is no scientific religion higher than the truth," and who are determined to do that which lies in them to their fullest capacity to further the interests of dermatology and more particularly to place in that position which properly belongs to it, American dermatology, whose contributions are daily adding much of value to the general stock of information and knowledge. In closing, permit me once more to thank you for the honor you have conferred upon me in electing me your presiding officer for this meeting.

